

# The Terror Film Festival of 2008 - a Hellish Train Ride!

by Baron Craze

The **Terror Film Festival** ASCENDED again onto the unsuspecting society of Philadelphia, PA for the third year straight and its fiery presence was met with loud crowds of and for the filmmakers from the fans and the public. As in previous years, the festival started on Tuesday, though this year, starting time would be a preferred 5pm instead of the dreaded 2pm, making it more open to the public and kinder to the out-of-town filmmakers. The filmmakers, who ranged from worldwide, enjoyed the later hour of the fest, for it allowed them to enjoy the city and its attractions and a few got to go on a special trip to South Philly, with Claw, Princess Horror and others. The fest had no shortage of films – both features and shorts, and the talent on hand was first rate, it was the best of best, mixing new and current genre artists together. This year the submitted films rose greatly and increased from last year's totals and the films ranged from such country as Turkey and New Zealand. In addition, two time Academy Award winning **ALAN HOWARTH** made a special appearance at the festival to promote the heavily nominated film, **BASEMENT JACK**.

Some of the selected films seemed to fall into patterns, such as controversial topics, and others had similar subject matters and that would appear on the same nights. These would present themselves in shorts and in features that would close out the evenings, before the incredible after party events would start for all attendees. As in previous years, the festival was pushing boundaries and never playing it mild or safe nor going for the quick buck and sacrificing the audience to poorly made pieces.

This festival truly serves up many short films for the audience to enjoy and display the new talents of filmmakers, as they seem to understand that they never get the respect they deserve which makes it difficult for them ever to get the distribution to expose their craft to more people. The 'shorts' are tougher to do than the features, in the sense that you only have about 30 minutes to tell the story, define the characters, and bring the climax to the audience. These films normally do not recoup their monies and the hope is to make them into full-length features. Here, there are both the chance of that happening and the ability to talk, meet, and network with other filmmakers.

"All aboard! The Terror Film Festival is leaving on track 13 for its own Terror on the Train, and this train is bellowing more than black smoke and having Claw as the engineer, and the ever so lovely Princess Horror using this as her chariot. The train carried her to the forefront of what now has become the standard-bearer at all horror festivals to have their own 'scream queen' as the representative. Princess Horror, though, is not a spokesperson or eye-candy, she is artist too. This train would be presenting 62 films over the course of 5 days."

The presentation of the films generally started with three segments that repeated over the course of the 5-day event, and it would be on average five short films for the two segments that would be about 60 minutes and then the feature film segment. The only changes to this were on Friday night and Saturday nights of the fest, which was the awards night. As last year's staple, the filmmakers (including their cast and crew) went onstage for an orderly Q&A from the audience. An additional note, the program guides were in the form of comic books, graced with Princess Horror and a vampire creature, rumored to be Victor Blood.

Tuesday, October 21, was the first night of the festival and it far surpassed any expectations of the festival organizers as the crowds on hand were three times the totals present to the previous years. There were immediate changes in this year's festival, as such, using a submitted short film as one of the trailers to invite the audience to become comfortable in their seats. The trailer was none other than **EL ZOMBIE DE LA MUERTE**, set in Mexico, a funny two minute short that opened the festival, and quickly generated a buzz to the growing audience with its aged brilliance of a heavy green tint. The audience brought into debate whether the word 'brains' is universal in zombie language and genre. The best line of the short is "Brain Tacos", though these words do not convey the humor that is upon the screen. Each year the festival finds an amusing short to start the festival, which repeated at each segment of each day for 16 times in total!

**The first short of the night** that was of interesting and layered with *Twilight Zone* influences throughout was entitled, **THE EYE OF MENW** (and yes, that's the correct spelling). This film was layered from camera direction to the storytelling and the pacing of the film was tight for the most part. Actress Giovanna Galdi portrayed the character, Victoria, and was on screen 90% of the time, giving not only much screen time, but also, the sole principal person responsible for conveying the emotion of the film. Director Charles A. Christman III's editing and pacing with the tempo was to keep the audience on edge and trying to determine the next possible move that would happen. The supporting character was 'the skull'. Though never consciously speaking, it conveyed all it needed with the lengthening shadows into the hollows of the remnants of the eyes giving the ability for it to hint to unknowing future horrors. Sorry gore hounds, there is none in this film, but there is a convincing lead performance that should keep your interest as the festival continues its trek.

**FOET** (pronounced "fee") uses a screenplay adapted from a short story by F. Paul Wilson and perhaps influenced by Jonathan Swift's "Modest Proposal". This 'short' was the first of two controversial films shown at the festival, though not advertised. The film dealt with the sensitive issue of abortion, and as it was at the Ethical Society Building, the objective possibly to keep it low-key. If so, the festival organizers made the best decision, especially with such subject matter and political rallies occurring across the Rittenhouse Square, as not to bother the fans and the filmmakers. This film was disturbing to some of the audience and a few left in disgust, as it involved a homemaker, Denise, portrayed by the talented Ellen Mareneck, is addicted to shopping and craving the latest fashion, pocketbooks of dead baby skin. Those three words just roll off the tongue, and after all, we learn thru the film that it is legal to mass-produce them, as stitched-together from aborted fetuses, which are not human, as the courts have ruled. This black comedy hints of a Hammer Studios production, mixing horror, minor experimental-surrealism, and the political and religious sensitive topic of dead fetuses and recycling. The audience quickly learns that **FOET** is the name for the fashion line introduced to society. Director Ian Fischer pits extreme moral dilemmas and ethical outrage against the norms found in the tender under belly of a baby, where society is more concerned about saving animals – with outrages against leather and fur usages, and so seemingly no true cares about babies suffering or starving – though none of this preached to the audience. The surrealism surfaces in the nightmarish sequence that has to be seen to experience it, though it has trademarks to Mario Bava and to the 1970s horror film **Demon Seed**. It is strange for a horror movie to delve into this material without making it an overall art-house horror film or tasteless. Neither of these elements occurs in this film, rather the director and cast spread confidence in the material throughout. Some of the language also contributes to the film's controversial nature, but that is what propels this film to the forefront. Although there was a tough dialogue line in the film for some to handle, involving babies and gloves, but this film and the director pushed the envelope and that is what makes films more memorable.

The feature of the night was **LUNICIDAL**, but before the film showed an honorable mention of the teaser trailer for **DEVIL IN THE WOODS**, made a premier. Douglas Scott Johnson created this teaser, though the film was more of short than a trailer, as it is about 10 minutes in length. The audience, however, enjoyed it. This film was welcomed by all, but to those in the audience from New Jersey, it had more impact as it was set in the New Jersey Pine Barrens, and featured a different angle on the urban legend of The Jersey Devil. Director Douglas Johnson stated he had watched all the previous films on the legend to see their views and storylines before creating his own version – a Devil that targets those who have done evil. He and Rebel Production Associates used CGI special effects to create the Devil, rather than use an actor in rubber or latex suit, yet still kept the production cost well in check. The film starred Norman Macera, who also starred in and wrote the film **LUNICIDAL**, so upon this it became evident why they were screening them together.

**LUNICIDAL** is a film of special importance. It is 20 years in the making and still needs minor tweaks, such as a tighter edit, according to Norman Marcera, screenwriter of the festival's opening night feature length film and would close out the night. Although this was his second year of being selected by the fest, this film was much shorter than last year's entry, **MURDER BELOW THE LINE**. Norman stars as John Good, a well liked fellow who spends his time as a local dork who enjoys reading to children and who also takes pleasure in being a neat and tidy serial killer, which is awful hard to do when one wears white overalls constantly. The film generated a large audience and brought a chorus of laughs as this horror film is

definitely a b-movie that does not take itself seriously. And with the dialogue being so over the top, it is a film that really generates attention – corny, and yet an attractive horror romp. This though is not a straightforward slasher film. There is a battle of serial killers because Johnny's opposition is a messy killer, uncaring of his actions. The film has a sense, as a what-if scenario, about what if **The Odd Couple** of Felix and Oscar were serial killers. However, the film uses a unique element of Philadelphia within itself, and that is the ominous images of Eastern State Penitentiary and a fine ending that proves the film worth.

**In the first presentation on Wednesday**, October 22, the crowds did taper off very slightly, yet there was still a steady flow of them into the festival. Princess Horror wasted not one minute of the night to unveil the second controversial film of the festival, in the first segment called Wild Shorts. The film was **THE 9TH CIRCLE**, by director and special effects artist, Damien Leone, who won the Best SFX Claw Award at the festival. One very scary clown does the setup for this film as he uses a most original style to abduct a woman on a train platform on Halloween night for a special loving date. For those familiar with the title, it can be suggested that it relates to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and this draws comparisons through the ultimate sins, hellish delights, and ravaging torments. This is a terror filled train ride to sickness and fun for horror fans. The film preys of the innocence of this woman and instills in the audience this can be happening to anyone of them. Taken under the platform of normalcy and safety, there are many references to satanic imagery such as nine circles of Hell, demonic creatures, a cult leader – Dark Lord, and a blood chalice. This imagery splashes onto the screen, as the dialogue is limited and mainly is screams and torture porn. A fantastic scene in the film, and gore hounds take note, is the carnage of first, a rape, and then, a forced birth that is ripping out a fetus - very much inspired by **ROSEMARY'S BABY**, but updated to today's standards and shock elements, and it might be better than Hollywood's remake of that said film. There was a large discussion among moviegoers that the forced birth scene was actually a forced abortion, which had some women aghast in either manner. The director worked for two years to create the demon makeup and masks, with trial and error, and Damien's mother helped with funding and locations.

Also in this first segment was a film called, **EVEN**, which gives a new way to exact revenge. It was created by Director Ben Jurin, giving everyone a quick lesson in the skillful arts of both storytelling and editing with a horrific shock. This film believes highly in extremism, and carnage, and it is truly a film not intended for vegans. However, it might serve as a reminder to all corporate executives and children who inherit companies' fortunes to be aware of office politics. The plot here was simplicity at its finest, because the film is only 6 minutes long and it never holds back the strong hold or gore. A young man taken advantage of by a skillful man named none other than, "Barnabas", who is enjoying sucking the life out of this man – it is not what you think.

There was a production filmed in Philadelphia called, **ST. LUKES**, which needs to have an honorable mention, as guerilla filmmakers and co-directors Ray Davis and Isaac Ruth, filmed on the city streets without permits and tons of problems on a film that has contaminated painkillers transforming citizens into zombies. Ray stated, "This [Terror Film Festival] is a great event and we are treated like rock stars, given press kits, and given all this attention... so cool!"

In the second segment of the night for the short films was the elegantly crafted **EEL GIRL**, by Aussie Director Paul Campion. This was his second straight year that he had entered a film with last year's being the amusing **NIGHT OF THE HELL HAMSTERS**. This is a film that has lots of potential and possibilities to venture into different areas, and easily displays the talents of Paul, though his entry did not win any awards – is a recount needed? There is undoubtedly a lot of CGI use in this production that normally is seen in large Hollywood productions, however the over usage does not offend the audience. Rather, they are treated to an eerie short. In fact, audiences worldwide have had the opportunity to witness this film as it has played in over 40 festivals. The plot is a horror-romance storyline, about a military science project that genetically alters a woman who is also part eel with an exquisite sexuality that draws others to her, so that their love can be joined and fed. This is the first film that is true to Greek mythology, about sea creatures called Sirens that use mystical powers to lure men to their demise. Paul's film is not far off this mark.

**The feature film of the night was, SWAMP DEVIL**, which starred Bruce Dern, and was a film that had all the general horror requirements, including a swamp monster, that in some ways resembles the **SWAMP THING**, but not with the same kindness and caring. The film had great CGI values and a good pacing to the it, and the plot was about reuniting an estranged father and his daughter in a bond, while the swamp equally and always joining in to create a stronger reliance on the outside world. A noted scene from **THE EVIL DEAD** films appeared when the vines showed demonic possession to do the Swamp Devil's bidding. The film was in the capable hands of veteran Hollywood Director David Winning, who has captured many awards for television productions. And even though this film aired on the Sci-fi channel earlier in the month, it was well worth seeing again on the big screen.

As Thursday, October 23, came upon us, excitement was focused on the feature film of the night, though for others, today was the hump day of fest, and from here it would speed up with the sands on time cascading down, only to lock its doors and seal their fate. All in attendance were learning about this new filmmaker and the troubles that plague filmmakers in producing, and exploring and evolving their craft as it can be compared to being on a raft set adrift. Truly, all must work to together to design the best product and the greatest form of their abilities to enhance their art.

The first segment of the shorts featured the sci-fi/horror film, **CREEPERS**, by Director Nick Thiel and his friend, CJ Johnson, who was an actor and producer on this film. The overall feeling in this movie generated tension and had the audience come to grips with our own prejudices and fears. Perhaps this film was using the political landscape of the historic presidential race as an underlying tone in assisting it in generating such an internet buzz. Nevertheless, Nick provides a film that harkens back slightly to a cross between **JOHN CARPENTER'S THE THING** and **PHANTOMS**. As the film progresses at a quickened rate, because of the unknown terror chasing them, there is never a moment of hesitation from actors CJ and Sarah Ashley, as they are a mixture of hard razor edge and rollercoaster-like emotions, respectively. As they are at zero hour of infestation, similar to **28 DAYS LATER**, from the unknown source and feeding frenzy of paranoia that swirls around like a tornado, while trapped in a tiny apartment, there is no concept that the film is hurried along, nor is the audience ignored or sacrifice for the betterment of the film. **CREEPERS** lets the creeping terror into the tiny room that the actors, and even the audience, are trapped in, with a raw energy power drain that is feeding on paranoia and secretly social views and that is in essence -- the realism in the film. The film treats the audience to a complete mystery storyline for these 17 minutes. This film actually prepared the crowd on hand for the feature film of the night. And they sat in anticipation and they waited, and amassed in great numbers for that film.

In the following short segment, a proposal presented itself for a reality TV series called, **SERIAL TV**, from the creative resources of Chris McGuinness, and the talented actor, Jim Chlopecki. The film is actually framed as a TV pilot and uses the scenario made famous by **MTV's REAL WORLD**. Just like in the civilized world, these serial killers, who are as unique as the actors that portray them, are not allowed to harm their roommates. So, could a serial killer, who has the rage, anger and the instants to kill on the pace of any disease that exists, refrain – watch and find out! Jim Chlopecki stars as Lance Red, the creator and producer who will do anything to ensure the success of his concept, and the show highlights the stellar marks he sets for it and himself. After all, one must have a killer show to make a large profit in the Nielsen ratings!

As the lights were turned down, and a green hue escaped from the screen, it was time for Ben Rock's **ALIEN RAIDERS** to open unmercifully on the audience, making them both aware and scared of shopping this holiday season, and in general. Ben has his own fame and a cult following which appeared at the festival, for he was part of the team that created **THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT** and is an old salt when it comes to horror films, having worked on nine of them in his young career. Although his filming of this production occurred during the Writers Guild strike, it did not hinder the project. This movie had a positive spin and effect on itself creating a throwback where the back-story is invasion, and not given any more significant details. Which is similar to many sci-fi/horror films such as **THE THING** and **THE X-FILES**, especially highlighting the character Mulder and his nickname Spooky. The basis of the film is how a well-armed, well-trained, and dedicated assault force seize a supermarket to stop the invasion and then advance to other unearthly realms. Another great aspect of this movie is the lack of CGI, and in its place, rather old-fashioned effects that are able to excite any gore hound and please any sci-fi fan. The

cinematography was by the award winning and talented Walt Lloyd that became available thru the writers' strike that dampened the Hollywood market. The shadowy effects did not hurt the film either. Rather, they accelerated it, as the film makes subtle hints to, and surpasses, films like, **THE FACULTY** and **THEY LIVE**, and never looks back. And just like the solar vastness and unpredictable patterns, the ending of this film is equal to that element. This film will be on DVD and available in 2009 from Raw Feed and exclusively distributed by Warner Brothers, and it claimed the top prize of Best Feature Film at Terror Film Festival.

**Friday, October 24, of the festival** included the filmmakers who had arrived thus far. The crowd on hand was a mixture of fans and filmmakers having large discussions with each other. The festival organizers did their best to include everyone, especially the screenwriters of which some huddled off by themselves and did not feel welcome in the beginning of the festival, but by now felt accepted. So many individuals were clamoring for pictures with Claw and Princess Horror and each other. Friday's programming included two vastly different types of feature length films. However, first there were the short programs, that special element of the fest that had become triumphant and had a loyal following at the festival.

One of Florida's top student filmmakers, Director Ryan Spindell showcased his short horror film, **KIRKSDALE**, that left the audience aching and mouths agape, not in disgust, but rather, in awe for more from this director and his film. The movie screams for a full length feature version and though some would like to make comparison, the closest that comes to this film would be the dreadful, **DON'T LOOK IN THE BASEMENT**. The setting is the 1960s in a southern mental hospital pitting reality against a double dose of insanity – on one side, it is a corrupted immoral deputy and a confused girl versus friendly fiends that are misunderstood - instead in visiting? This hospital might fit into the current health care system in the United States today. His film is not torture-porn, but rather, has the sadistic overtones found in the movies of the early 70s, such as, **THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE**. Ryan's film is a downright eerie set tone and curls around the unsuspecting audience members and throttles them. As a film that is only 10 minutes long, it is far better than any episode of the most recent television horror shows, aside from **MASTERS OF HORROR** and **DEXTER**. Though still, this is from a student filmmaker and that is excellent company for this film to be a part of. While Ryan provides an excellent foreground, it is the cinematography work of Julie Hotz that gives us the grimly, and a saturation of sunshine and the skilled talents they possess are clearly influenced by Tobe Hooper and Alfred Hitchcock.

A great b-movie horror comedy was present and was hands down an incredibly funny film - especially if one understands the culture of the 50s era, which was the setting for this film. **PROMBIES!** plot is straightforward and simple. It is young couples, sexual settings and zombies. At first they might not seem to work together, unless one takes on abstract thinking, and then it makes a lot of sense! The moral lesson presented here, is that men, in general, are animals, and become mindless zombies when seeking sex. This is the first film to show men or zombies corrupting the young flowers of women and making them into numbing zombies. This harkened not only in the setting to the 1950s, but also was in black and white, with the shadow images of lustful images common of films long ago in the cinema. Zombies bred after these brief fleeting moments come with hands, legs raised in passion and signaling the act had occurred. **PROMBIES!** was another excellent film from Florida by Director Frederick Snyder. See this film with either your children as a lesson of the birds and bees, or be daring and see it with a lover!

**GOMEDA** made its United States premier, which has become commonplace for the Terror Film Festival, though like other festivals across the nation and around the world there are always premiers, but this film is from Turkey and is the first surreal-horror film of its type to be created. The title of the film is from an actual place in Turkey and considered by many to be haunted, so there was not a long leap of faith that a horror film came from this area at some point, even in the socially conservative country of Turkey. As with many horror films there seems to always be an odd number of friends, and here is no different – five – therefore the audience knows one will always end up by themselves sooner rather than later. In addition, the director was obviously influenced **THE EVIL DEAD**, how and where – watch and see for this beautifully executed homage scene. Filming took place in caves, which in essence already makes for a creepy atmosphere as where torture had taken place at this dreadful and yet surreal location and these torturous acts are attacking the group in dreams where they have no defense. The attacking of the dreams leads from nightmares to sickening and perverse hallucinations questioning even their own points

of birth. This is a complete art-house horror film capitalizing on surrealism practices and beliefs of the director, the film had English sub-titles, and the composition of the music keeps everyone riveted. Even though Director Tan Tolga Demirci could not be on hand for the film and none of the cast was able to make the journey, the Composer, Semih Tareen, flew in from Seattle to attend the festival.

**This was not Semih Tareen's first time** associated with the Terror Film Festival. In 2007, he directed and composed a 7 minute epic in total style and homage to Mario Bava. That film was **YELLOW**. Additional information about this film is available in the article covering the festival last year.

However, Semih Tareen would not be the only composer this night to grace the stage and take hold of the Q&A session microphone. There would also be a man that would hold the attention of all on hand for over 45 minutes speaking on the film, **BASEMENT JACK**, and that man was **ALAN HOWARTH**. Nevertheless, both would become the composer duo, Semih and Alan, young and experienced respectfully, each taking home Claw Awards!

**BASEMENT JACK** is a classic slasher genre film, though it has incredible elements that were refreshing from Director Michael Shelton, as this is his first film ever that he had a director role. Although he has worked on over 17 previous horror films as a special visual effects creator, and in this film again CGI was heavily limited. The killer, portrayed by Eric Peter-Kaiser, gave a Johnny Depp impression and mixture of other gothic like film characters, though never going over the top, as he never speaks and makes no sound. He is triggered to kill entire families during a storm. His caring mother and weather patterns assist him in his triggered killings. The plot is simple and that is what makes this film so enjoyable. Jack had been caught and sent away to a nice mental facility for killing 15 people and leaving one lone survivor, but an error in paperwork allows the sweet man to walk out the front door to enjoy both nature and visiting with strangers. While the argument can be made that it is similar to **HALLOWEEN**, there are elements that show this film is standing on its own. There are two key actresses, first is Michele Morrow (Karen), a lone survivor from many years ago seeking to find Jack. Then this film is graced with scream queen, Tiffany Shepis, who is a staple in horror films with a growing count of 50 films. The key of this interconnected cast seems to be the fact that most have done many horror films and have a core understanding of how they work and how to cause terror. And this film is not without its fair share of jump scenes, gore lusting, and quirky characters, such as Nathan Bexton as the manager. There is plenty for all horror fans to enjoy, especially those lusting for the gore. This film is not a let down in that department. If anything, it's drenched with bloodlust, but never losing itself, and provides great amounts of twisting in the plot. Alan Howarth gives a stellar performance by using his music prowess to create both the aura and personality of Jack, using a mixture of tempo and tone. The tone allows for and is designed to lead in the audience and lull them into a safe haven – only to have the Director Shelton then wreck havoc on them. Alan's best element is displayed thru the music box and it simply must be witnessed to understand the usage of his vast talent. And like all good horror, there is always a crack at the end for the customary glimpse at a sequel and this film definitely needs one! Or perhaps a final chapter better states it. For this is the second of a horror film trilogy. The first, "Evolution", and the third "Necropolitan" (*In Development*).

Alan Howarth was at the festival for many days and freely gave his time to talk and answer as many questions as one could, and never avoided any of the fans that just wanted to get his photo with them. So many had awe for him, after all he is an Oscar famed composer who has worked on almost every cool film of the past 20 years, and he is someone that takes pleasure in speaking with the young talent in the room. He never vanished from the Terror Film Festival – staying for each segment and even attending all the after party events. He also became the festival's first ever Lifetime Achievement Claw Award recipient and accepted multiple awards – five in total!

Saturday, October 25, the final day, had arrived. For some, it was to be glorious, for others, it means returning home and working harder on their craft. But to all, this day was going to be hard on the emotions. Nevertheless, the festival organizers handled all of the emotional escapades, never letting the tears of happiness and sadness become visible, that it was all to end around 10pm. And there was still one final filmmaker yet to arrive from Australia. Would they make it on time for their screening and the **CLAW AWARDS**?

The planning of the final day was as if it were a Broadway show, with everyone knowing their cues, marks, lines, and letting others just flow with the emotions with instincts to know where to be at precise times. There were to be 3 sixty minute segments today starting at 1pm, and then the last feature film, the amazing **SQUEAL**, that would end the film screening programs. All that would be left after that would be the Claw Awards!

**The first film of the short films program** which was entitled, Spewing Shorts, was a film called **THE PROCEDURE** that was very tainted with the usage of Sir Alfred Hitchcock, and in positive effect. Director Sergio Pinheiro brings to the screen a film that would easily fit in as a **TWILIGHT ZONE** episode, and that might become the norm in helping people in a down economy and poor job outlook. The job is simple, record the data while the project manager brings test subjects with fraying mental status and gives them objects and options to complete the procedures. Sergio takes his input and has learned Hitchcock's technique of suspense and stamps it on the entire apparent suicide scene, which is very enjoyable to view from the audience. It is not for a moment too long or too short, just pure perfection.

In the next segment of shorts, there were outstanding horror films, such as **ABSENT**, which makes the Hollywood film **TEACHING MRS. TINGLE** look like a G-rated production. Aaron Mento directed this 80s throwback horror film assisted by the talented lead actress, Mary Ann Biewener, captured the Claw Award for Best Actress. The movie poster design with Aaron's input paid homage to the video nastiness of the 1980s. The element of this film is for gore hounds, to relish in the passion of the blood, which incidentally occurs at a real classroom for a 2 day shoot that has two students returning to the scene of brutalization and mass suicide of evil portions. Though there was comparison, made by some attendees, that in the barest form this film was advocating popularity to the Columbine Massacre, however this viewpoint was dismissed by Aaron who instead wanted to create a production that dismissed the current Hollywood model of playing it safe with horror films.

The next film **EXCISION** was about family values, and a lesson on Parental Guidance, from Director Richard Bates, Jr. The storyline is common and yet with a twisted horror line twist, normally a movie like this would be on Lifetime Network, if it were not for the extremism on the horror. Parents neglect Pauline, a female teen, played convincingly by Tessa Ferrer, as they care for her sister who is plagued with cystic fibrosis. Normally, a child's interest in medicine and surgery is encouraged by parents, the standard line 'my child is a doctor', but here that does not exist. Pauline's dreams help her launch her plan to orchestrate the perfect solution to assist her sister, reunite her family and become the angel in the family's eye. Richard uses surreal imagery in Pauline's dreams, which was offensive to some, both men and women, though not to the extent in **GOMEDA**. This film will make current and future parents think about their children, and keep them all in focus. If not, then Richard will show us the realities of our society, with mental horrors becoming part of the social landscape and news flashes.

As the award ceremony was fast approaching, filmmakers' nerves were becoming more on edge. The suspense favored the festival and their anguish would continue to plague them. This would not matter as the next shorts segment entitled Slaughter Shorts began with two excellent films. The first, **WHEN SALLY MET FRANK**, a highlighted film from Australia, made its appearance with the Director Victoria Waghorn arriving just in time and on cue for her Q&A session. This is an incredible film because of the feat that occurred in bringing it to the screen was 5 days, 24 hours of editing, and one special little piggy. This was the first and only female director to be on hand to promote a film this year, which is showing both the festival's and Princess Horror's support to female directors and also the advancements that women are making to the prominent position on a set. The plot is as direct forward as a head crash into a brick wall. Each year, millions of women are crawling their way to perfection under the knife for this ludicrous element of physical perfection (though men are doing this now too, though no where near the butchering rate of women). The obsession with perfection is the fairytale, for those involved in massive dance of a scalpel and suction devices on and under their tender flesh. This film has Frankenstein qualities to it and is a piggish tale, referring to something more sinister, that we are all the pigs at the trough of body alterations, and this unknowing tale to the audience could be a precursor to a feature. Victoria has been on a worldwide journey supporting her film, which one usually has to do for an independent film these days, let alone a short film. In her own words, "I'm here because no one is going to know me or care about my film if I don't come out to support it."

**Brian Lonano's film ATTACKAZOIDS!**, marked his second straight year accepted into the festival, though it is not just that he was there last year, but rather his film carried him here for all to enjoy. A staple of Brian's previous work shows itself here again, as retro graded special effects that would make the late Ed Wood envious and a young Steven Spielberg quiver. Although his film is a brief 7 minutes, like previous shorts presented at the festival none lacking on their storytelling, overall this is a good sci-fi film that surpasses **MARS ATTACK**. Brian most likely would venture back to those films of the 1950s to compare his movie to, which many seem to suggest communism as other worldly attacks, as Brian makes subtle political links to with his film. As in his previous film, **ELECTRICAL SKELETAL**, Brian uses miniature sets to create a marveling array of features while mastering the techniques of the black void. A heavily layered plot exists, however, the overall concept is average people in a very abnormal situation, that is dark and limited. But, there is some glimmer of light, as in **WAR OF THE WORLDS** (1953), yet the director and his cast keep this disguise very well, allowing for a sequel.

The second feature of the night, **SQUEAL**, used a similar device to open its film like that of some released versions of **PSYCHO** (1960). That device is an attached trailer that uses the techniques of mystery and restraint, except to inform the viewers that a medical testing has gone terribly wrong. The horror playbook of characters had not expanded, hence these unfortunate characters -- three-piece band, a manager, two hot girls, nevertheless, the audience does become emotionally concerned about them, because of a strong screenplay. Although, there are the standard elements found in many low budget horror films, odd gas station folks, drugs, yelling matches, and nudity, and of course isolationism, these are no problem for Director Tony Swansey as he guides the film with professionalism and believability. There is no breath taken when out of the shadows when the family of fun loving homicidal maniacs are formally introduced to their guests, but there will be a relishing aspect for any dedicated gore hounds. All gore hounds will savor in the beautiful blossoming bloodlust that spreads across the screen like a mad painter overdosing on absinthe. One of the key maniacs is 'pig boy', the creation of this character is solely from actor Mike Masset, who is key to the very end of film and an element used in **HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL** (1999). The viewers do learn by the end of this film a key lesson, even a manipulation of genetic chromosomes polygamy is still considered unfavorable -- though learning how we learn is wonderful to watch.

The festival and its organizers had provided and performed a flawless show and delivered on perfection. Not for a moment was there any panic or arguments, just endless smiles, greetings, handshakes, and laughter. They received a 5 star rating, based upon: organization's energy and enthusiasm; pacing of the festival; greeting the filmmakers with Festival Kits; treatment of the filmmakers and screenwriters as filmmakers and the fans as equals; and lastly, the organizers performance in handling themselves and the press' accessibility. The festival's staff handled all situations with calm and tact, never allowing voices or tempers to rise, providing a fun and safe event. Competition at this year's festival was very stiff, with so much talent crammed into each category, all vying for the coveted Claw Award, and to be on the stage with Princess Horror. This event is bringing all sorts of creative people together -- musicians, composers, producers, executive producers, writers, actors, actresses, dancers, directors, and crew personnel, all to view the new talents and network better than most social groups online. This is raw energy taking a new form, becoming its own individual with its own soul -- all due to the backgrounds Claw and Princess Horror.

The Terror Film Festival does give the filmmaker the acclaim they've earned and deserve for the passion of their film to live and breathe at the fest, on the silver screen, with all the pageantry and attention attributable.

From the final night, as the Terror Film Festival's "Terror Train" pulled into its final stop, the best of the best had gathered to see if their fulfillment answers their prayers, hopes, and dreams, share the stage for a moment with Shawn Cain and Princess Horror, and if they would claim the infamous **CLAW AWARD**. Though unknowing to all filmmakers in attendance that were gathering upstairs at the Claw Awards reception, a truly new show was being prepared below, all in their honor. The filmmakers made their journey down the spiraling staircase into the main theater for the awards show. Multiple flashes came from photographers who greeted them from every side, with their smiles and awe evidently present on their faces and clearly unsure how to react. Filmmaker Sergio Pinheiro stated, "This is unlike any other

festival. We are treated like Hollywood stars.” Once inside the theater, the greatness excelled even higher, as there were multiple video cameras set up and another photographer awaiting them. Claw made his appearance on the stage to introduce a special guest that called in to give his celebratory congratulations to the legendary Alan Howarth. This special guest introduced his new film to a delightfully surprised audience and was met with an ungodly roar when they recognized the voice of none other than **BRUCE CAMPBELL**. The roar continued for his trailer, **MY NAME IS BRUCE**. And as the Claw Awards began, Shawn Cain of Seattle’s **INDEPENDENT FILM UNITED** took the stage and provided the final piece of excitement to the award show. And his wit, skill in working with the media, and masterful control of keeping the show on time and knowing the audience, propelled the event into the stratosphere.

**The party afterward** was exclusive to filmmakers and the organizers of the show, and it was held in the private room of the Raven Lounge, an excellent site to close out the night and the festival, in a place that featured both Poe pictures and the infamous absinthe fountain, the drink known mostly to the artist crowd. The night and party had a bass line groove that had smiles and laughs for all there, including Alan Howarth, who had no ego whatsoever as the demons and spirits flowed freely in the room. By 3am, the event had ended, with filmmakers slowly exiting after long lengthy handshakes and hugs, pats on the back, and friendships that were set in stone. The goodbyes were sincere and sad that it all had to end. And as the Terror Film Festival “Terror Train” screeched off into the darkness and beyond, the unescapable laughter of Princess Horror and the rye laughter of Claw echoed across the barren city streets!

The **Terror Film Festival** has announced it is returning with a star-studded event in 2009. Check it all out at [www.terrorfilmfestival.net](http://www.terrorfilmfestival.net).

A full listing of winners is here: [http://terrorfilmfestival.net/\\_wsn/page6.html](http://terrorfilmfestival.net/_wsn/page6.html)

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